



STAFF REPORT

TO: Environment & Planning Committee

FROM: Mary-Anne Baker, Policy Planner

REFERENCE: W301

SUBJECT: **RIVER USES AND VALUES SIGNIFICANCE ASSESSMENT - REPORT REP10-04-03** - Report prepared for meeting of 8 April 2010

1. INTRODUCTION

The Council has a schedule of water body uses and values in the TRMP (Schedule 30.1 in the Water Part V of the Plan). The identification of the uses and values for that water body, and their relative significance helps guide decision making in respect of water (quantity) management objectives and in respect of water permit applications to take and use water. The Schedule is now also explicitly referred to in Part IV of the plan in relation to activities in the beds of rivers.

The way in which water body significance (such as regional or national significance levels) was assigned to specific values in the TRMP was questioned both by Council and by submitters at the time the Schedule was developed. There are appeals on the Schedule that still remain to be resolved around these issues.

In resolving the appeals and looking to improve the Schedule, it became quickly apparent that there was little to help determine thresholds of significance for various values for rivers either from other councils or at a national level.

Council sought Envirolink funding and with Professor Ken Hughey at Lincoln University, established a national working group to develop a method for determining significance across uses and values. It subsequently developed RivSAM – Rivers Significance Assessment Methodology.

The Envirolink project then applied the new method (RivSAM) to eight different river values. It used an expert panel and Multi Criteria Analysis approach and was hosted by a regional council, applying the method to one of the values for that region's rivers. A summary of the method principles is attached as appendix 1 for information.

The values and host councils were:

Salmonid Angling	Tasman District Council
Swimming	Horizons
Native Fisheries	Wellington Regional Council

Natural Character	Marlborough District Council
Irrigation	Environment Canterbury
Native birdlife	Environment Canterbury
White-water kayaking	West Coast Regional Council
Iwi Values	Southland Regional Council

2. NEXT STEPS

So far the project has developed criteria and thresholds of significance for the individual values listed above. It is now also in the process of developing a further set of these criteria and thresholds of significance for hydro-electric power generation potential within the Environment Bay of Plenty region (also funded by Envirolink). The next step in this process is to apply the method to all of the values in Tasman District. The output of this will help the Council and its stakeholders and communities understand more about their rivers' values and their relative importance. It will give some rationale to the use of significance labels such as "nationally", "regionally" or "locally" significant. Applying the method to all the values in one region will also help refine the method further by verifying that the thresholds are consistent between each value.

Other councils are about to apply the method for all or some of the values. This and the work done in Tasman will help verify that the national thresholds are correct between councils for each of the values. Finally, the work in Tasman will help develop a guide book for further application of the method elsewhere – issues such as time input of staff and external stakeholders, cost, and capacity building will be covered.

3. STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

The level of stakeholder interest in the application of this significance assessment tool is expected to be very high. This is so, both in terms of resolving appeals on Tasman's water bodies uses and values schedule, and in relation to how the information provided by this assessment process can then be applied to making management decisions about the region's rivers.

It will be very important that Councillors, other TDC staff and stakeholder groups understand how the assessment methodology was developed and how it is applied. To that end, we propose to run a workshop on 19 April. We intend to invite, as well as staff and councillors, representatives from a wide range of stakeholder groups and interested parties.

The workshop will include a detailed briefing by Professor Hughey on the RivSAM method, how it was developed and how it is to be applied. He will give more detailed information to show what the output is for particular values (including the salmonid angling report which was based on Tasman rivers).

We then wish to commence work on establishing working groups for each of the values for which we have criteria and thresholds to work through for Tasman rivers in much the same way that the salmonid angling project was undertaken.

Each working group will include a technical expert, council staff, stakeholder group representative(s) and a facilitator, either Professor Hughey or Dr Kay Booth (Lindis Consulting), who has been working closely with Professor Hughey on this project. The working groups will meet at times convenient to the members of the group over the following two months.

4. REPORTING BACK

The output from each of the working groups will be a list or spreadsheet of the District's rivers relevant for the particular value. It will include relevant data used in the ranking process and a significance ranking for each river or reach of a river as nationally, regionally or locally significant.

This output will then inform any subsequent decisions by the Council in relation to the improvement of Schedule 30.1. Note that any changes to the Schedule will be subject to public consultation and submissions.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 That this report be received.

5.2 That Councillors note the planned workshop on 19 April.

Mary-Anne Baker
Policy Planner

INTRODUCTION

The Council sought Envirolink funding in 2008 to develop thresholds of significance for river uses and values. The purpose was to outline a method to develop assessment criteria and significance thresholds for river values, for application within national and regional planning under the RMA. The method that was developed:

- Establishes criteria to assess the river value.
- Identifies significance thresholds for these criteria (to identify their importance) and additional factors pertinent to rating the significance of the river value.
- Outlines a means to determine the significance of a river for a specific river value.
- Defines terms in order to provide a common language for practitioners and decision makers.

The method has applicability for all river values. It facilitates variation in its implementation to accommodate the particular characteristics of each river value. However, once applied for a specific river value (e.g. whitewater kayaking), the expectation is that the method developed for that river value will become the standard approach to significance assessment for New Zealand rivers with respect to that value.

PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING THE METHOD

In order to be practical, the method works within the constraints of available information. The following principles and practices have been followed in developing the method:

1. Consistent – The same method will be used for all river values (e.g. recreation, irrigation, biodiversity), with adaptation as required.
2. Transparent – All steps in the method are defined explicitly.
3. Holistic understanding of values – A comprehensive description of a value's attributes is provided. Attributes are identified from the literature (see Smith 20091) and via an Expert Panel.
4. Representative – A subset of attributes is selected to represent the river value within the method.
5. Quantitative – The selected representative attributes are measured using quantitative indicators wherever possible. Where quantitative data are not available, a proxy is used, that is, the judgment of an Expert Panel.
6. Adaptive – When quantitative indicators are unavailable, data requirements are recorded. A river value research strategy may be compiled from this information across all river values.

7. Standardised – While the assessment criteria are based on objective data as much as possible, the determination of significance is by nature judgmental. The method standardises this judgmental process by setting significance thresholds and importance weightings. Factors influencing judgments are recorded – written documentation is used to avoid a ‘black box’ result, which is open to criticism.
8. Tiered significance – The method recognises national and regional and local significance. International significance is not addressed as the method is targeted at national and regional level decision-making. Nevertheless, there is room in the method for recording matters of international significance.
9. Focused – Most rivers may be treated as single entities but larger rivers may need to be subdivided into two or more segments where their character alters.
10. Iterative – As the Expert Panel progresses through the steps, decisions taken within previous steps may be reconsidered. Furthermore, the application of the method to a particular river value can be revised as new data become available.
11. Impartial – The method does not attempt to assess significance between river values (e.g. recreation c.f. hydro-generation), as this is the role of the decision-maker.
12. Incorporates ‘well-beings’ – Attributes which represent the river value are chosen with consideration to the four well-beings (social, economic, environmental, cultural). Not every river value assessment will express each well-being.